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Waffen SS

in

ACTION

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Combat Troops
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Waffen-SS in ACTION

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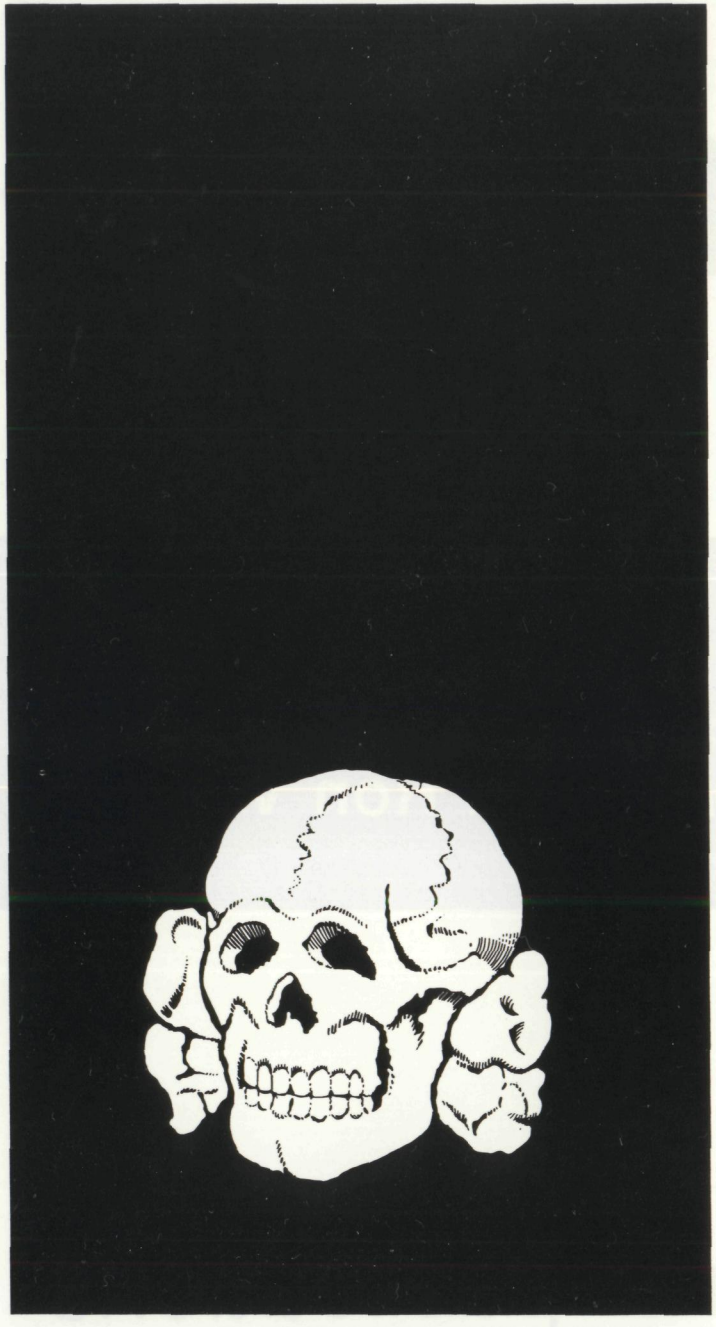
squadron/signal publications



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Introduction....

During the years which have followed since the close of the Second World War, there has been a steady growing interest in the military operations, equipment, uniforms, insignia and organizations of the German Armed Forces of that period. Specific reasons for this phenomenon are many and varied. I am sure that for each person asked why his curiosity revolved about this area of military study a different reply would be made. These answers would differ in degrees but yet could be grouped in general catagories. A certain amount of mystery and mystique surrounds specific groups of the German Wehrmacht such as the **Afrika Korps** and **Waffen-SS.**

In the case of the **Afrika Korps,** their exploits and operations are legendary. Its personnel has long been recognized as being among the finest in the **Wehrmacht.** This opinion comes not from German propaganda but rather from their opponents, the British and Americans, and range from high ranking officers to and through the enlisted ranks of both nations. Such esteem from ones adversaries can not be overlooked.

The **Waffen-SS,** on the other hand, will be remembered from the pages of history for entirely different reasons. As an outgrowth of strictly political means, the **Waffen-SS** never achieved the status of being a fourth branch of the German Wehrmacht collectively. The **Wehrmacht** (Armed Forces) consisted of the **Heeres** (Army), **Kriegsmarine** (Navy) and **Luftwaffe** (Air Force). The **Waffen-SS,** literally "Armed SS," was subject to the Army during field operations. Due to their training (particularly during the early war years), availability of equipment (political blessings) and a somewhat higher standard of reliability on the battlefield (a direct consequence of the first two mentioned items) the **Waffen-SS** had by the mid-war years become known as an elite formation as a whole. Towards the end of the war in Europe, late 1943-45, greater and greater emphasis began to be placed on Waffen-SS involvements and activities. While the need did spring from military necessity to be sure, it also reflected the changing political climate in the German Reich. Hitler had never maintained complete faith in his High Command, thus after much political intrigue, at least three attempts on his life and a general deterioration in the positions of Hitler and his High Command in regards to the conduct of the war effort, the politically stable Waffen-SS were felt to be the only ones to carry on the "cause."

Many writers have referred to the German Armed Forces on a whole as the "Nazi Army." It is my opinion this indicates some slight amount of prejudice on their part or lack of complete understanding of the organizational structure of the German political/military system. During the Second World War it may have been politically necessary to make such sweeping statements and generalities to instill purpose and motivation in the people of the countries engaged in hostilities against Germany. It is understandable that remarks and statements made for such purposes would be directed against the head of state, in this case Hitler, and his political party, the Nazis. If, however, we are to accept this term, "Nazi Army," at face value we would be led to believe that the entire military structure of the German Armed Forces were dedicated, do or die, members of the **Nationalsozialistishe Deutsche Arbeiterpartei** (N.S.D.A.P.) - National Socialist German Workers' Party, commonly shortened to Nazi. Simply, this is not the case. The German election held on March 5, 1933 showed 56.1 per cent of all the votes cast against National Socialism. Nevertheless, the N.S.D.A.P. remained the single strongest united mass power in Germany and through use of the democratic process Hitler became dictator.

These election results show that while Hitler was later able to bend the democratic process to his own ways and become head of the German State it is not quite as unanimous as at first thought. N.S.D.A.P. members were in uniformed military service during the war but the majority of military personnel served out of a sense of duty to one's country, an extremely strong feeling among the Germanic peoples. In proper context, however, we may speak of a "Nazi Army," but only if we define this as a military organization composed of dedicated party members. The SA (**Sturmabteilung** - Storm Troopers) and SS (**Schutz-Staffel** - defense corps) were para-military organizations and as such do not completely fulfill our definition. The Waffen-SS, a branch of the Allgemeine SS (General SS) formation does fall within the stated guidelines and should therefore be regarded as the only military organization which could be called the "Nazi Army." Even here some reservations will be made for during the latter part of the Waffen-SS's existence changes were being made which would detract from the purist viewpoint.

There can be no doubt that much of the interest which has grown in matters of German WW II history has been brought about by the profusion of material which has been produced since the end of the war. Our own ". . .In Action" series is one such source. Volumes and volumes concerning individual units, groups and various combat operations and campaigns have been written and will support just about any viewpoint one would wish to take, pro or con. The format presentation selected for the Squadron/Signal series is one of photographs, to supplement these mostly textual works, and to best serve the needs and requirements of our many readers. For this reason the text accompanying WAFFEN-SS IN ACTION is forced to be held to a minimum, but enough to adequately portray the importance of this group.

I hope I will be forgiven if I refrain from the use of that phrase "Nazi Army" in my text, the objectivity of which I have explained above. I feel our readers are above such sensualism and are concerned with historical fact.

Norman E. Harms
Uwe Feist

Background to the SS and Waffen SS

During the formative years of the National Socialist crystallization, the brownshirted Storm Troopers (SA members) comprised the Party's "army." This private "army" grew in size with the passage of time and became a mass organization. Although one of the SA's first duties had been to supply protection to Hitler and other high ranking Party officials, the mass organization concept made Hitler somewhat uneasy. Anything in large numbers is difficult to control and Hitler felt a need to create a special elite force that would be totally dedicated to him. This feeling resulted in some 200 select men formed into a body guard initially known as the **Stosstrupp "Adolf Hitler."** Later they became known collectively as the **Schutzstaffel,** SS (protection squad or defense corp).

The political affairs of Hitler and his Party rose and fell during the early 1920's. Failure of the Munich Putsch in 1923 saw Hitler sent to prison, there to write his "Mein Kampf," and the SA organization banned from activity. The SS had been overlooked by German authorities. When freed from prison in late 1924, Hitler's need for a special bodyguard seemed to have grown in his viewpoint and the SS's position within the Party's structure had been achieved.

Reemergence of the SA in 1926 placed the SS formation in the background of activities until 1929. On January 16, 1929 Hitler appointed Heinrich Himmler to the position of **Reichsführer SS** and charged him to ". . .form of this organization an elite troop of the Party,. . .dependable in every circumstance". Total strength of the SS at this time was but 280 men. In January 1933, Hitler had accomplished several of his goals, Chancellor of

Germany, and the SS had grown to include some 52,000 men. Each member had been carefully selected and represented the finest men, both physically and politically, that the N.S.D.A.P. movement could offer.

In the meantime the SA had grown as well. The end of 1933 saw some two to three million Storm Troopers under the leadership of Ernst Röhm. Growing unrest amongst their ranks jeopardized Hitler's position in his attempts to court the affections of the German Army and conservative elements in the nation, support from whom would be essential if he were to continue in his cause. The solution to this problem came on the night of June 30, 1934, known as the "Night of the Long Knives," when Röhm and seventy-seven leading Party members along with thousands of other individuals considered "dangerous" were assassinated.

This purge of the SA broke its power structure and thereafter would fulfill duties of a secondary nature only. The SS on the other hand had been ". . .troops dependable in every circumstance. . ." providing the firing squads for the purge. Until this time the SS had remained a nominal part of the SA organization but now gained its full independence with Himmler responsible only to Hitler and the SS becoming a separate functionary of the N.S.D.A.P.

From this independent position, Himmler expanded the numbers of the SS and created special branches such as the **Sicherheitsdienst** (SD) (SS security service) and after gaining control of the Reich's police system in June 1936 further extended his control to such that few aspects of German national life were left untouched. Assumption of German police powers gave an extremely broad base of power to Himmler for the German police structure covered such areas as shipping, civil aviation, harbors, railways, forests and fisheries to name but a few.

As **Reichsführer SS und Chef der Deutschen Polizei im Reichsministerium des Innern,** Himmler's full title as Chief of the German Police, he directed that the police system would now be divided into two branches - the **Ordnungspolizei** (regular police) and the **Sicherheitspolizei** (security police). Remaining in uniform, the **Ordnungspolizei** performed their normal duties. The **Sicherheitspolizei,** comprising the Reich **Kriminalpolizei** (Criminal Police), Kripo, and **Geheime Staatspolizei** (Secret Police), Gestapo, operated as undercover agents. Later to increase efficiency the SD, Kripo and Gestapo were combined in a new office of the SS called the **Reichssicherheitshauptamt** (Main Office of Reich Security), RSHA, in September 1939, under direction of Reinhard Heydrich. Heydrich remained in command of the RSHA until his assassination in June 1942. For a short time Himmler assumed command directly of the RSHA but then passed the post to SS Gruppenführer Ernst Kaltenbrunner, who held the position until the end of the war.

One result of Himmler's take over of police duties for the Reich, had been that officials and members of the Security Police and Regular Police were all given equivalent rank in the SS. Few men of the **Ordnungspolizei** were SS men, even if the rank titles were the same. Thousands were gathered into Himmler's SS Police regiments, several of which were deployed in combat operations on the battlefront. The majority of police regiments saw service engaged in anti-partisan operations behind the front lines. It has been pointed out that some of the worst atrocities which the SS have been accused of committing were in fact carried out by German policemen. These SS Police regiments are not to be confused with the **4. SS Polizei Panzergrenadier Division,** a field division of the Waffen-SS, created by order of Hitler and manned by some 15,000 personnel of the **Ordnungspolizei** drafted for this division.

Until 1933 there were no officially recognized branches of the SS and its membership formed the **Allgemeine SS** (General SS). After receipt of official acknowledgement of the specialized branches, i.e. SD, those persons not so attached were considered **Allgemeine SS** members. A handful of armed troops had been held by Himmler for ceremonial and security purposes. Designated **SS Verfügungstruppen,** these armed SS troops grew in numbers slowly during the prewar years. Included among the numbers of the Verfügungstruppen were Hitler's personal guard unit, **Stabswache,** under command of Josef (Sepp) Dietrich, later to evolve into the **1. Panzer Division "Leibstandarte" SS "Adolf**

Hitler." Another group of armed SS members formed in late 1933 at Dachau, **SS Totenkopfverbände** (SS Death's Head detachments). The first of these units had been commanded by SS Standartenführer Theodor Eicke, their assignment — guard concentration camps. Eicke, after the SA purge, was appointed Inspector of Concentration Camps and Commander of the SS Death's Head detachments. This action seems to be a reward for his part during the purge. The **Totenkopfverbände** themselves were rewarded (they had also provided firing squads) by being removed from control of the **Allgemeine SS,** and expanded in size.

On March 17, 1933 Dietrich established a special armed detachment of 120 select SS men, the members of Hitler's **Stabswache.** Thus for the third time within a span of ten years, Hitler had caused to be created a group, possessed of superior qualities, for his own protection. In September 1933, during the N.S.D.A.P. rally, Hitler awarded the **Stabswache** its official title of **"Leibstandarte SS 'Adolf Hitler'** (**SS Bodyguard Regiment** 'Adolf Hitler')," LSSAH. November 9, 1933, the tenth anniversary of the Munich beer-hall putsch, the Leibstandarte swore an oath which unconditionally bound them to the Führer, effectively removing them from direct control of the Reichsführer SS and the N.S.D.A.P., becoming Hitler's new praetorian guard.

On March 16, 1935, Hitler announced his intention to reintroduce military conscription and that the Army would be established at thirty-six divisions, the last vestige of the Versailles Treaty had been thrown off on an official level. Another order issued on this date directed the formation of the **SS Verfügungstruppe** to be fully formed as a military unit, intended to serve as the building block of an SS division. The existance of such a group caused much misgiving among Army circles. Creation of a fully militarized SS organization challenged the army's right to be the nation's only weapons bearer, a point of long standing honor. As matters developed no full SS division came into existance until after the outbreak of hostilities but elements of the **LSSAH** were the first German troops to enter

SS Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich.

Saarbrücken during the occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936. There can be no doubt that this indicated the growing importance of the armed SS.

To supervise administrative and military training for the SS field units, an **Inspectorate** of **Verfügungstruppen** had been established within SS Headquarters on October 1, 1936. To head this new organization Himmler chose a retired high ranking professional soldier, Paul Hausser. Hausser had been active in SA functions and transferred to the SS, becoming head of the first SS officer's academy, **SS Junkerschule "Braunschweig."** Hausser would become the number one soldier of the Waffen-SS, first SS officer to command a corps, an army and then a full army group.

The newly appointed **SS Brigadeführer** Hausser, he had retired from the Army as an acting lieutenant general, gathered the various battalions of the **Verfügungstruppe** to form two regiments, **"Deutschland"** under command of **SS Standartenführer** Felix Steiner, and **"Germania"** under command of **SS Standartenführer** Karl Demelhuber. LSSAH remained in Berlin.

Due to the small size and the intent from the start to create an elite force, the training of the **Verfügungstruppe** achieved a level higher than that of regular infantry units. Until 1939 the SS infantrymen were trained as assault troops, the end product was similar to the U.S. Army Rangers. Organized athletics, sports and physical fitness, were an integral part of the program, a feature not found in normal German Army training. Political and ideological courses never let the SS trooper forget that he was a part of an elite Party formation.

On March 11, 1938, German troops marched into Austria. Among the leading elements of General Guderian's XVI Army Corps were a motorized battalion of the LSSAH. After the addition of Austria to the Reich, Himmler created for the **SS Verfügungstruppe** a new regiment composed of Austrians and named **"Der Führer."** In August Hitler issued a decree establishing the position of the **SS Verfügungstruppe,** not a part of the Wehrmacht or of the Police but rather a standing armed force at his own disposal. In the event of mobilization, SS troops were to serve under operational control of the Army.

SS General (Obergruppenführer) Dietrich presents awards to two SS Unterführer-Anwärter, NCO candidates. All members of this formation are personnel of **Leibstandarte SS "Adolf Hitler,"** Dietrich's command. Special note should be made of the **"Ehrenwinkel"** (old campaigners' chevron) worn on Dietrich's right sleeve. These chevrons denoted SS men who had joined the SS or other Party affiliated organizations before January 30, 1933.

The Polish Campaign saw all available **SS Verfügungstruppe** engaged in combat. The only exception being the Austrian SS Regiment **"Der Führer"** that had not as yet completed training, their September 1939 being spent holding positions in the German West Wall defenses. The SS Reconnaissance Battalion, the newly created SS Artillery Regiment (raised as part of the "to be" **SS Verfügungsdivision**), Regiment **"Deutschland"** and an Army tank regiment joined to form the 4th Panzer Brigade. Regiment **"Germania"** joined the 14th Army in the southern part of East Prussia. Members of the LSSAH supported by the SS

Combat Engineer Battalion were a portion of the 10th Army operating from Silesia. A reinforced infantry battalion, **"Heimwehr Danzig"**, reorganized from the **SS Totenkopf Sturmbann "Götze"** created for police duties in and about the city of Danzig, also entered battle under Army control.

Upon conclusion of the Polish Campaign, the SS units involved were withdrawn to Germany for reformation purposes. The three regiments of the **SS Verfügungstruppen** joined together to form the **SS Verfügungsdivision** and LSSAH was transformed into a reinforced motorized regiment. Both the Wehrmacht and SS used the period between the Polish Campaign and the invasion of France, the Phony War, to rebuild and expand their forces. In Himmler's case his supply of combat trained manpower had been exhausted in forming the Verfügungsdivision and increasing the size of LSSAH.

Two additional divisions were to be formed in the SS structure but it would be some six months before they could be made combat ready. A simple solution was found whereby the partially trained members of Totenkopf and Police units would be transferred to these divisions. The decrease in personnel for the original units would be made up by normal recruiting methods. By the end of November 1939 the SS had three active field divisions, **Verfügungsdivision, SS Totenkopfdivision** and **Polizeidivision. Polizeidivision** grew somewhat as a stepchild. It was not considered an "elite" formation; Himmler admitted these police members were not ". . .National Socialists nor SS men". As a consequence they received poorer equipment drafts compared to the other SS units, i.e. horse drawn artillery as opposed to motorized artillery.

Growth of the armed SS had caused considerable friction between the OKW, **Oberkommando der Wehrmacht** (Armed Forces High Command), and the SS. Finally in February 1940 an understanding had been reached between the OKW and SS whereby the status of the armed SS became clear, war operations under control of the Army, and that service within these formations would be counted towards the military service obligation. Himmler agreed and on March 2, 1940 the title of **Waffen-SS** became official.

SS-Rottenführer of the **"Heimwehr Danzig"** unit during the Polish Campaign. With the exception of the distinctive SS collar tabs, denoting rank, the outward appearance of insignia of rank for the SS remained the same as for the other branches of the Wehrmacht although individual rank titles were changed. Thus the single chevron and shoulder strap insignia of rank for the Army's Gefreiter and the double chevron and shoulder strap for the Obergefreiter would be seen in the Waffen-SS formation in which case the rank titles would be SS Sturmmann (Lance Corporal) and SS-Rottenführer (Corporal) respectively. This system carried through the NCO and officer ranks as well.

SMG crew of the Polizeidivision in France May 1940.

Sturmgeschütz III Ausf A, assault gun, and Panzerjäger 4.7cm PaK(t), the first self-propelled German anti-tank gun. Both of these vehicle types were forerunners of the much improved equipment which would be in such demand on the Eastern Front. Waffen-SS divisions employed both assault guns and Panzerjägers, usually having a greater number of these vehicles within their formations than comparable Army units.

The Waffen SS Marches

The end of April 1940 saw the Waffen-SS at full combat strength and ready for its next assignment. The next phase of conquest, **Fall Weserübung** - the invasion of Denmark and Norway, had begun on April 9. Luftwaffe **Fallschirmjäger** (paratroopers) and Army **Gebirgsjäger** (mountain troops) had been assigned to this task and except for a few tense moments, the operation sailed to its successful conclusion. (see Squadron/Signal Publication's "Fallschirmjäger In Action"). This success prompted Hitler to launch his much delayed offensive in the West, **Fall Gelb,** the invasion of Holland and **Fall Rot,** the operations against France.

Three Army Groups, B, A and C numbering some 136 divisions, gathered along the 400 mile front from Holland to the Swiss border. Of these divisions, LSSAH and the **SS Verfügungsdivision** would be in the vanguard; **Totenkopfdivision** would be held in OKH reserve while **Polizeidivision** formed part of Army Group C's reserve force. Eventually all were caught up in the rapidly moving battles in Holland, Belgium and France. The value of the Waffen-SS units lay not in their quantity but rather their quality.

The organizational structure of the SS units tended to be somewhat larger than their Army counterparts, a fact which would continue through the war. Also, with the exception of **Polizeidivision,** they were fully motorized. The **Blitzkrieg** concept of warfare was in its infancy and still being proven, the rapid advance of the German panzer formations could only be matched by motorized units, and few of these were possessed by the German Army in 1940.

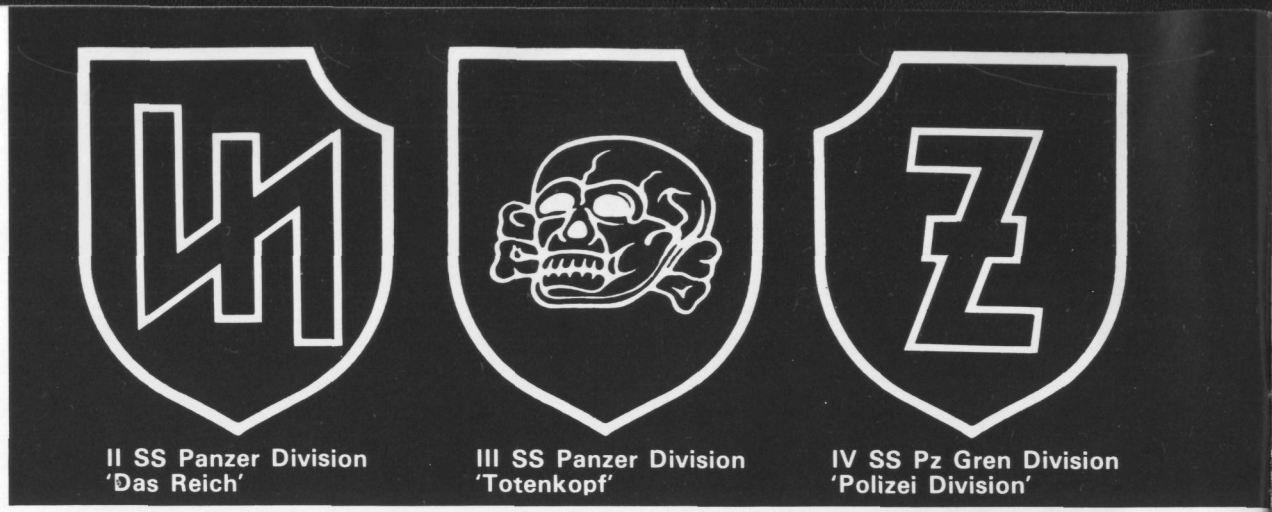
Even after the "Blitzkrieg" concept had been established, clearly showing the need for fully motorized infantry units, these forces were still few in numbers when the invasion of Russia took place. Later during the war, the greatest share of the burden of offensive and defensive fighting fell to the Panzer and Panzergrenadier troops; the bulk of the German Army remained lacking in adequate transportation. The Waffen-SS, on the other hand, held a distinct edge over its Army companions being motorized from the beginning and due to their small numbers, in comparison to the hundreds of divisions belonging to the Army, and their special place through political means, generally had available the latest equipment including tanks and vehicles. From the mere fact of mobility, the Waffen-SS divisions would play an important role in coming battles. In regards to their fighting performance during the Western Campaign, the SS had their share of fighting and

established their reputation as warriors of a superior nature.

Even with the seemingly effortless victories which had taken place in the west, Hitler's attention had never been turned from his major objective - Russia. Following the fall of France preparations were again undertaken to rebuild and replace losses and expand the military forces for their greatest undertaking - Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union.

In December 1940 **Regiment "Germania"** transferred from the **SS Verfügungsdivision** and together with the new regiments **"Nordland"** and **"Westland"** and the 5th SS Artillery Regiment formed the newest SS division, named **"Germania".** Loss of **Regiment "Germania"** within the Verfügungsdivision had been filled by a SS Totenkopfstandarte and the division renamed **SS Division "Deutschland".** The name was short lived, however, as the division would easily be confused with the existing regiment of the same name. In January 1941 division **"Deutschland"** became **SS Division "Reich".** The new division **"Germania"** also had a name change shortly after its formation for the exact same reason. Thereafter **SS Division "Germania"** became **SS Division "Wiking".** In late 1940 two Death's Head regiments had been transferred to Norway and attached with a communications unit. This group became known as **SS Kampfgruppe "Nord"** (SS Battle Group 'North'); June 1941 saw the battle group upgraded to a full division with the addition of remaining divisional units. Waffen-SS units now were equivalent to six divisions.

Hitler's plans for the invasion of Russia were



II SS Panzer Division 'Das Reich'

III SS Panzer Division 'Totenkopf'

IV SS Pz Gren Division 'Polizei Division'

3.7cm PAK 35/36 anti-tank gun and crew in action during the Greek Campaign.

Light machine gun crew, MG 34, during the Balkans Campaign. Taught to be aggressive, thus setting an example, casualties among Waffen-SS personnel generally ran higher than normal Army units.

some what short circuited when his Italian allies invaded Greece without prior warning. The Italian attack soon stalled and required German intervention if the situation in Greece and the Balkans was to be restored and the southern flank protected of the impending Russian invasion.

Initially sixteen division and the LSSAH were moved into position against Greece. The situation worsened when Yugoslavia, who had just recently signed the Tripartite, withdrew from the alliance by fact of a military coupe. Additional divisions, including the **SS Division "Reich",** were ordered to the area; Hitler intended to teach the Yugoslavs a lesson. The German armies began their offensive at dawn on April 6, 1941. Four days later the Yugoslavian Army capitulated. Although heavy resistance was offered by the Greeks and the British units which had been withdrawn from the Western Desert to support them, Greece fell on April 30.

The end of the Balkans Campaign closed on a note of victory for the Germans, the time spent, however, had cost them almost half the available campaigning season for Russia. There can be no doubt that this lost time in opening the offensive eventually cost Hitler the victory he sought in the east. Nevertheless, at dawn on June 22, 1941 one hundred and thirty-nine German divisions, including forty-eight panzer divisions, along with a Hungarian army corps and fourteen division of the Rumanian Army prepared to cross the Russian frontier. SS divisions **LSSAH** and **"Wiking"** were attached to Army Group South, **"Reich"** to Group Middle and **"Totenkopf"** and **"Polizei"** (in reserve) to Group North. **SS Division "Nord"** had been moved to Finland. This frontier crossing would mark the beginning of the greatest land battle seen on the face of the earth during its entire history. Three years of battle fought back and forth across the Russian landscape followed by almost a full year within Reich territory finally ending outside the ruins of Hitler's Chancellory in Berlin.

During the remaining period of the Second World War, many changes would take place in the Waffen-SS and many new units added to it. Casualties would be high. Replacements were not of the same high caliber as those men who originally manned the first divisions, but the Waffen-SS could always be counted on to do its duty. On numerous occasions the outcome of individual battles hinged on the Waffen-SS units involved.

Based on the past performances of the SS's field units and the growing need of more and more men and equipment for the Eastern Front, additional Waffen-SS formations were organized. A severe manpower shortage forced Himmler to include other nationalties within the ranks of the Waffen-SS to meet these needs. **Volksdeutsche,** ethnic Germans and west Europeans served as replacements in the elite SS divisions or were organized into **SS Freiwilligen Divisionen** (SS Volunteer Divisions). Eastern Europeans were separated into national

Greek refugees pass a halted reconnaissance unit of **Leibstandarte SS "Adolf Hitler."** The key insignia of the division appears on the front fender of the vehicle on the right, a Panzerspähwagen (Armored Car) Sd. Kfz. 221. The vehicle in the background is a radio vehicle, Sd. Kfz. 232 (Funk) with a frame antennae.

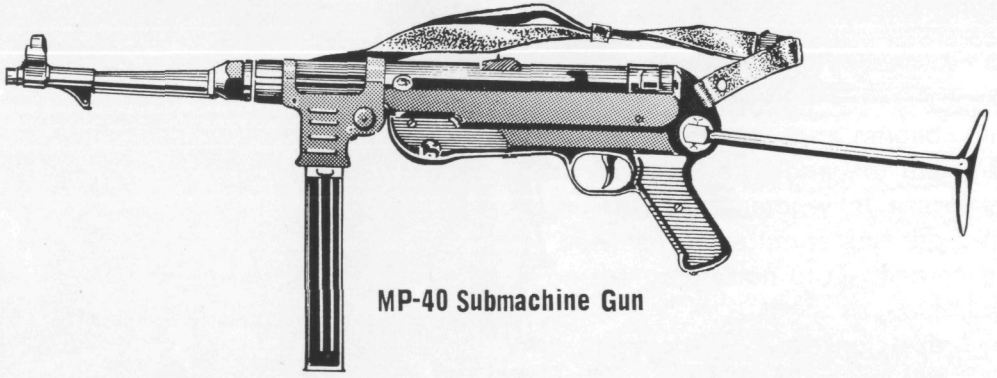
formations and bore the distinctive title **"Waffen-Grenadier Divisionen der SS".** The fighting capability of these units ranged from excellent, almost identical to the crack SS divisions, for the west Europeans, to useless, the case with the majority of east European units. **Volksdeutsche** rate between these limits and the measure of ability would be based on the proportion of Germans to non-Germans.

U.S. and British encounters with the Waffen-SS did not take place until the assault on the European continent, first on the Italian mainland followed by Normandie and the German withdrawal from France and the Battle for Germany. Those units engaged by the Allies were generally of good quality or above and left a lasting impression of their combat abilities.

No discussion of the Waffen-SS would be complete without mentioning the question of atrocities which were committed. The war on the Eastern Front was fought ruthlessly, representing an ideological clash between National Socialism and Bolshevism. Orders from both Hitler and Himmler allowed normal restraints to be removed, or so twisted in meaning that the "legality" under which such actions could be carried out to exist. The fact remains that atrocities were carried out, but implemented by only a small number of the almost one million men who passed through the Waffen-SS during the course of the war. The extent of such actions should not be exaggerated nor should they cloud the historical significance of the role played by the Waffen-SS in the defense of Hitler's Europe.

A StuG III A of the **1. Kompanie SS Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung "LSSAH"** approaches the first Soviet T-34 encountered by this unit, Mariupol, Russia, July 1941. The SS men are evacuating SS-Unterscharführer Bergemann after his unsuccessful attempt to destroy the T-34 with a mine. Several rounds fired against the tank at a range of 25 meters by the Sturmgeschütz failed to damage it. Destruction came as a result of gasoline "bombs" being hurled against the vehicle and setting it afire.

SS-Unterscharführer (Unteroffizier - Sergeant) fires MP 40 submachine gun, two spent cartridges from it appear in the upper right hand corner of the picture. Standard infantry weapons, such as the MP 40, were used throughout the Waffen-SS.



MP-40 Submachine Gun

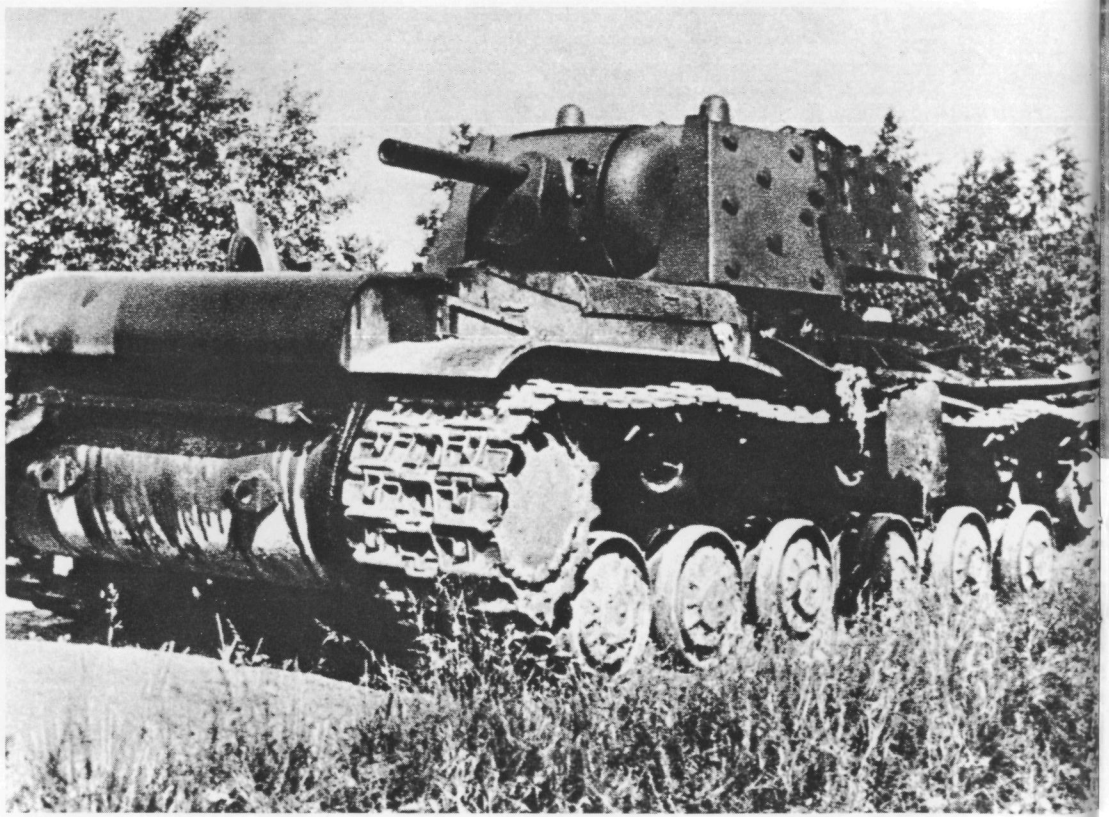
Panzerspähwagen, Sd. Kfz. 221. The divisional insignia, right rear fender, and the tactical symbol, left fender, tells us this vehicle belongs to the SS Panzer Aufklärungs-Abteilung 5 of the **5. Panzerdivision "Wiking,"** the armored reconnaissance battalion of the division. The large swastika on the engine hatch is used for aerial recognition.

V SS Panzer Division 'Wiking'

StuG III Ausf A, foreground, and StuG III Ausf C, most likely belonging to "LSSAH", June 1941. Both vehicles are armed with the short barrel 7.5cm StuK L/24 for which 44 rounds of ammunition are carried; no machine gun was carried for local defense, a feature corrected in later models. Note the gun of the vehicle in the foreground has just been fired and is in full recoile.

The introduction of the Soviet T-34 tank, during the early days of the invasion, came as a rude shock to the German forces. Initial handling of Russian armor forces showed a lack of skill in this field. Piece meal allotment of the superior T-34 into battle allowed German units to counteract this superiority but not without some measure of difficulty. Here two Soviet tankers surrender to a SS Unterscharführer.

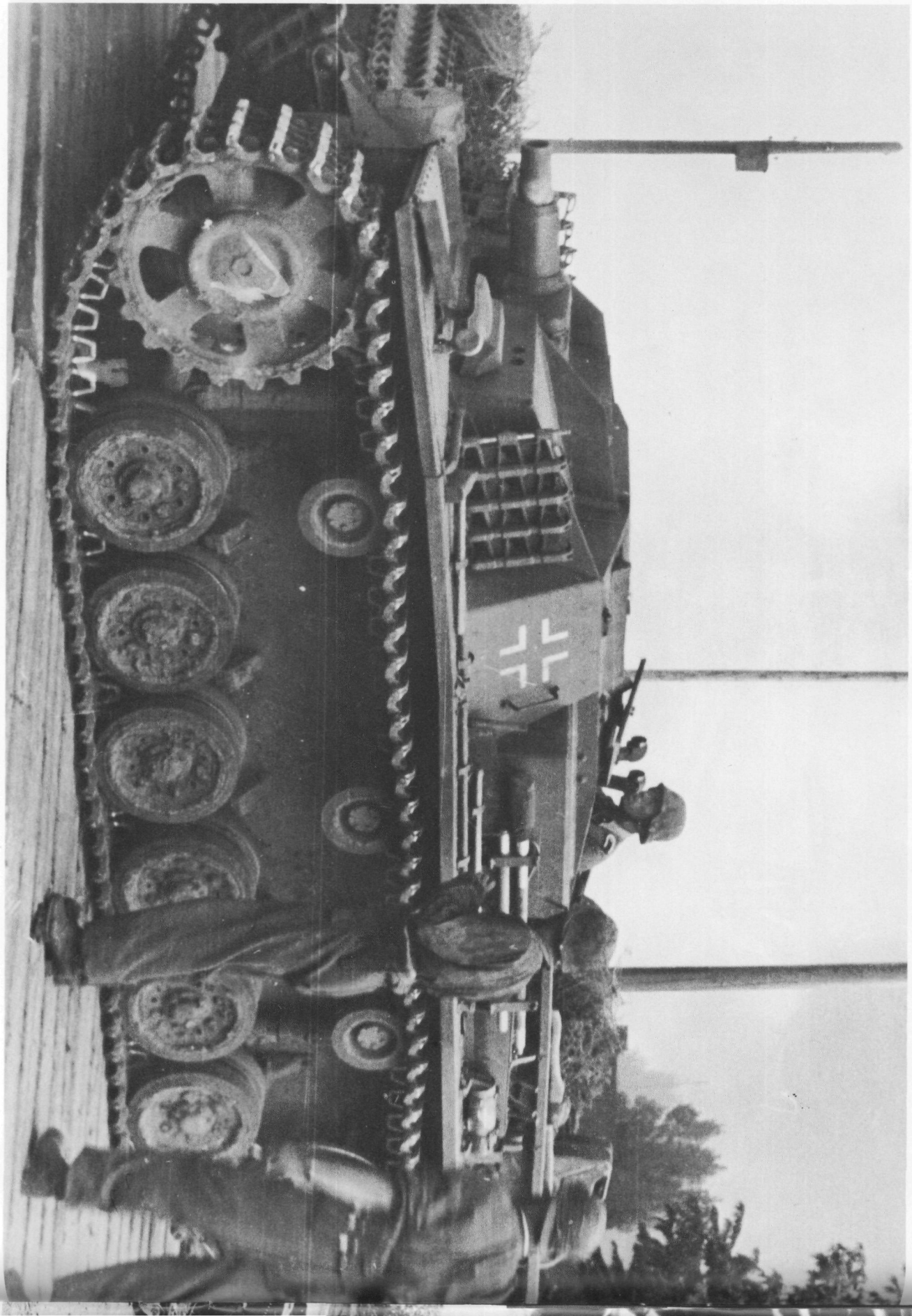
Generalfeldmarschall von Rundstedt, commander of Heeresgruppe Süd, and his commander of the 1. Panzer Group, Generaloberst von Kleist, faced the most difficult Russian positions of the opening days of Barbarossa. The Soviet Army Group South-west Front, under Colonel-General Kirponos, composed four armies in well camouflaged and organized in-depth defensive positions. Use of armored units, including the heavy KV-1, shown, and KV-2 allowed Kirponos to prevent an encirclement of Russian forces. The German Pz III with 3.7cm or 5cm guns were no match against these vehicles and German Flak and artillery units were employed to fight enemy armor.



Presence of the frame antennae on this **Sd. Kfz. 232,** eight wheeled radio armored car of "Wiking" division, indicates the photo was taken before 1942, the year a dipole antenna replaced the frame. Armament for this vehicle consisted of a 2cm **KwK 30** and MG 34 in the revolving turret.

Each Waffen-SS division included among its organizational structure a Flak battalion. Here the 3.7cm Flak 36 has been mounted on a 5t series half-track, **Sd. Kfz. 6/2.** Later versions mounted the 3.7cm Flak on an 8t series half-track and had an armored cab and radiator. The single barrel and four barrel 2cm AA gun mounts were also self-propelled in this manner.

StuG IIIC's began series production in March 1941, this particular one shown outside Mariupol, Russia, October 1941. Intended to supply "assault" artillery, this role became compromised to some degree when they were employed to counter enemy armored forces. The Sturm III is based on the chassis of the standard Pz III.



Panzerbefehlswagen III Ausf E, command vehicle, passes a resting detachment of SS motorcyclists. Although apparently armed, a dummy gun replaced the main armament in this command vehicle, leaving only the turret MG for protection.

(Above) By the end of September, von Kleist's 1. Panzer Group had disengaged from the battles of encirclement at Kiev. Further to the south the Russians had been able to mount a sizeable counterattack. Crumbling resistance from the Rumanians almost allowed 11th Army to be encircled. Disaster was narrowly averted with the arrival of 1. Panzer Group, who turned the tide of battle. The Russians now became the hunted and resulted in the bulk of their Eighteenth Army being destroyed between Mariupol and Berdyansk. Some 212 tanks, many similar to this knocked out T-34, 672 guns and 65,000 prisoners fell into German hands.

SS dispatch rider passes the wreckage of a Soviet T-37 amphibious tank. An abandoned Russian 45mm anti-tank gun stands on the right of the photo. Thousands of pieces of Soviet military hardware were captured during the early days on the Eastern Front. Much of this equipment again saw service, but under German command.

The poor road situation in Russia proved to be a valuable ally for the Soviets. The rapid advance of German forces into the Russian interior continually stretched the lines of communication and supply. With the advent of Autumn rains, the few roads turned to mud, further restricting German movement. Here elements of **SS Division "Reich"** pass through a Russian village on their way to Moscow.

(Above right) SS Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen SS Paul Hausser stands in the open hatch of his Sd. Kfz. 253 armored half-track. Hausser's division, "Reich," would spearhead the attack on Moscow. Tactical symbols on the vehicle indicate this is a headquarters vehicle of the division and is operating with General Guderian's Panzer Group, Army Group Middle.

If at least six men are needed to retrieve a single motorcycle and sidecar from the Russian mud, one can imagine the effort required for a truck or other wheeled vehicle which might find itself in the same position. During the "mud periods," autumn and spring, the only vehicles which could move with any ease were the fully tracked types.

The attack on Moscow was accompanied by heavy casualties on both sides. This Soviet machine gun crew, armed with the Russian Maxim PM1910 on the famous "Sokolov" wheeled mount, fell at its post outside the Russian capital. 60% of "Reich's" combat strength was expended during this operation.

(Above left) A portion of "Reich's" panzer grenadiers move into position outside Moscow. Two panzer grenadier regiments, each consisting of two motorized and one panzer grenadier battalions, formed the infantry portion of SS armored divisions.

Russian defense in the area of Heeresgruppe Nord had been heavy. Marshal Voroshilov, commander of the Soviet North-west sector, seized upon a chance to deal an extremely heavy blow against General Hansen's X Corps. The attack by the Russian Thirty-fourth Army threatened to push X Corps into Lake Ilmen. The recon battalion of "Totenkopf," among the most advance elements of LVI Panzer Corps, struck the Russians on August 19. Their determined attack dislodged the Russians; continued pressure forced them back. The commander of the recon battalion, Sturmbannführer Bestmann, was awarded the Knights Cross for his actions. This was the first Ritterkreuz awarded to a member of "Totenkopf" but not the last.

The attack on Moscow and the Russian winter counteroffensive had, by the end of February 1942, cost SS division "Reich" some 11,000 men, almost three quarters of its normal complement! In March 1942, the division was withdrawn from the front and sent to northwest France to be rested and refitted as a Panzer Grenadier Division. Shown here are members of the 2nd Company of the reconnaissance battalion upon their return to France.

(Above right) The "Death's Head" collar tabs clearly indicate these panzer grenadiers belong to **SS Division "Totenkopf."** Russian counterattacks launched in the northern sector effectively cut off some 100,000 men of the 2nd Army Corps, including "Totenkopf". These units were encircled for some 14 months in and about the town of Demyansk. Although portions of the division were able to break out, those who remained continued the defense until relieved in October 1942.

Heavy motorcycle, BMW R12, and rider of SS Panzer Aufklärungs Abteilung 3. The "waffenfarbe" for cavalry and motorized reconnaissance units were both golden yellow as seen on the rider's shoulder strap.

1940-1942

Scharführer, SS Division Leibstandarte,
SS "Adolf Hitler". Southern Russia
Summer 1941

Rottenführer, SS Standarte
"Germania" France 1940

Sturmmann, SS Division "Reich"
(later SS Panzer-Grenadier Division
"Das Reich") Near Moscow, Winter
1941/42

Obersturmführer, Feldgendarmerie,
SS Panzer-Grenadier Division
"Totenkopf" 1942

Untersturmführer, 8. SS-
Kavallerie-Division
"Florian Geyer"
Caucasus 1942

RONALD VOLSTAD
73

1943

Machine Gunner, 3. SS Panzer-Grenadier Division "Totenkopf" Kharkov, March 1943

Oberscharführer, 1. SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler"(Panzergrenadier-Division at this time) Kursk offensive 1943

Hauptsturmführer, 2. SS Panzer-Division "Das Reich" (Panzer-Grenadier Division at this time) Kursk offensive 1943

Panzerschütze, 2. SS Panzer Division"Das Reich" Kursk offensive 1943

Unterscharführer, 7. SS Freiwilligen-Gebirgs Division "Prinz Eugen" Yugoslavia 1943

RONALD VOLSTAD 73

Heavy motorcycle, BMW R75, with sidecar. A MG mount was provided on the sidecar, in this case the MG 34 has been detached and rests, ready for service, on the spare tire along with a stick handgrenade. Motorcyclist, second man from the left, wears the special rubberized motorcycle coat, a very practical garment considering the weather and terrain conditions through which they were required to ride. Tanks in the background are up armored Pz III F's, standard equipment within armored formations of both the Waffen-SS and Army during the early days of the Russian invasion.

(Above right) Two members of the **"Freikorps Dänemark."** This Danish volunteer unit, one of the first national legions raised by Himmler (Dänemark being an exception in being called a "Free Corps" instead of "Legion") during his new recruiting efforts, had been sent to join "Totenkopf" as a replacement unit on the northern front. They also were trapped in the Demyansk Pocket and waited out the long defense.

In August 1941, **Polizeidivision,** along with the **269th Infantry Division,** pressed a frontal attack against the Luga bridgehead, held by five Soviet divisions. The results were as to be expected, almost 2,000 casualties in Polizeidivision alone. Renewed effort, involving an additional three German divisions, pushed the defenders out of the town and the Soviet forces began their retreat to Leningrad. Eventually, 21,000 Soviet prisoners along with 316 tanks and some 600 guns fell into German hands. The SS guards for these Soviet prisoners, marching to the rear, are not to be confused with Polizeidivision, however, for members of this division wore standard German police collar tabs as well as the police insignia on their helmets.

The initial German Army issue anti-tank weapons, such as this 3.7cm PAK, were hard pressed when engaged by the heavily armored Soviet KV's and T-34's. It was not entirely impossible for the light 3.7cm PAK to knock out such vehicles but required cold determination on the part of the AT crew. On one occasion, a battery commander replaced the standard armor piercing round with one designed to combat concrete structures. The first round scored a direct hit and effectively ripped out the tank's insides, but this only at point blank range.

(Below right) Kleiner Pz Funkwagen, Sd. Kfz. 260, small radio armored car, of "LSSAH" shown during the parade in Paris, 1942. Photos of this vehicle are somewhat rare. Clearly illustrated here, however, is the folding frame antenna, in the down position, and the screen covered fighting compartment covers, opened, used to prevent handgrenades from being thrown inside. Crew for this vehicle was four.

Tremendous pressure exerted during the Soviet counter offensive in the Rostov area, forced "Leibstandarte" from the town and into its first defensive action of the war, nearly resulting in its complete decimation. Removed from the front lines, the division returned to Paris in June 1942 to refit as the SS Panzergrenadier Division **"Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler."** While refitting, they formed a portion of the reserve troops for the "Atlantikwall" and this fact was proclaimed to the world by way of a spectacular parade down the Champs Elysees. Here, VW Schwimmwagen, Kfz. 1/20, amphibious version of the famed Kübel, belonging to the 2nd Company of the recon battalion moves down this famed thoroughfare.

The Soviet counterparts of the German PK, Propaganda Kompanie - a branch of Dr. Goebbels' far reaching organization of the NSDAP, also used "staged" episodes to boost homefront moral. Just such an event is apparently happening in this case. The man to the far left of the photo carefully watches, clipboard in hand, as three fully equipped Soviet soldiers dash past the burning remains of a Pz IV F-1. Troops wear their greatcoats slung over their left shoulder and carry the standard 7.62mm PPSh M1941 submachine gun with a 70 round magazine.

(Below left) The crew of this camouflaged 5cm Pak 38 wear camouflage smocks over their field-gray tunics as well as camouflaged helmet covers. The distinctive camouflage patterns and colors were utilized to provide the best blending into terrain and seasonal conditions and most readily identifies SS units. The pattern and tone qualities of this photo indicate the pattern to be one of Spring or Summer and predominantly green and brown in coloration.

Armored command vehicles, Panzerbefehlswagen III Ausf K (Sd. Kfz. 141/1) shown, were a necessary element in the successful handling of large armor formations, providing the vital communications link. Unlike the earlier Panzerbefehlswagens, which were unarmed save for a turret MG, the Model K featured a fully operational turret including the 5cm KwK L/60.

Panzer and Panzergrenadier elements of "Leibstandarte" fighting in Rostov, December 1941. The tanks are, on the left, Pz IV F-1 and Pz II F.

(Above left) The capture of hundreds of thousands of Russians, thousands of guns and tanks clouded Hitler's mind into believing that the war in Russia would be over by the end of 1942 at the latest. Himmler pleaded to expand the Waffen-SS formations, but during the first half of the year only the new division 7. SS Freiwilligen-Gebirgdivision "Prinz Eugen" was established. "Leibstandarte," "Reich" and "Totenkopf" were withdrawn to France and reorganized into Panzergrenadier Divisions.

SS Panzergrenadier, rank equal to the Army's "Schütze" - Private in the infantry, of SS Division "Totenkopf" fires a rifle grenade from the spigot grenade launcher attached to his Kar 98K.

VI SS Mountain Division
'Nord'

VII SS Vol Mnt Division
'Prinz Eugen'

Panzer IV H of Panzergrenadier-division "Gross-deutschland," Caucasus area, Summer 1942. This division is not a Waffen-SS formation, but rather the Elite unit of the German Army. Much the same holds true for the Luftwaffe's "Hermann Goering" Panzer Parachute Division. These two units, along with the Waffen-SS Panzer divisions, were considered the most powerful within the Wehrmacht owing to their greater number of tanks within the division proper when compared to "normal" Army units.

During the initial phases of the offensive to the Causasus, "Grossdeutschland," had been a part of the LVII Panzer Korps, which also included **"Wiking," 13. Panzer Division** and a Slovak light division.

VIII SS Cavalry Division
'Florian Geyer'

IX SS Panzer Division
'Hohenstaufen'

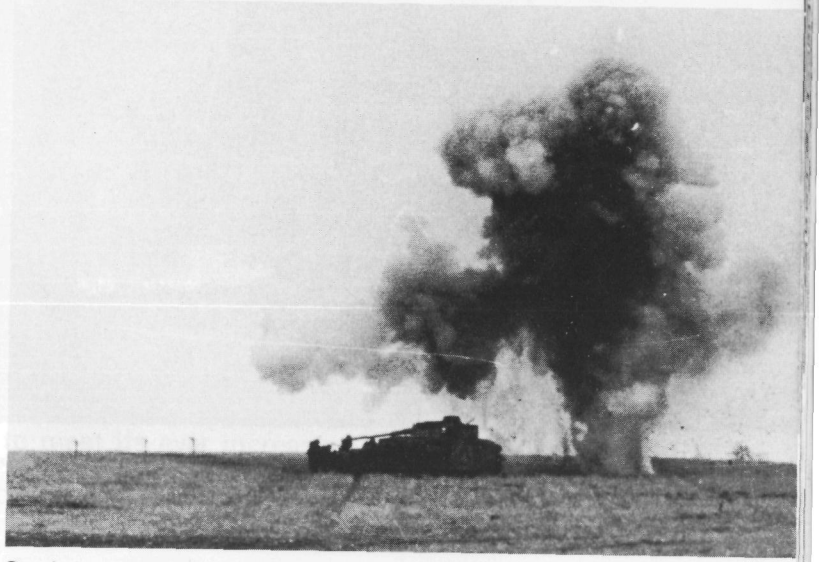
X SS Panzer Division
'Frundsberg'

XI SS Frw Pz Gren Division
'Nordland'

The German drive to the Caucasus and its oilfields, required the retaking of the town of Rostov and the bridge across the Don between it and Bataysk. On July 22 the Panzergrenadiers of "Wiking" along with Sturmbannführer Mühlenkamp's SS Panzer Battalion took the airfield outside Rostov; several more days would be required before the city fell under complete German control.

Panzergrenadiers aboard a Pz III M. Spare road wheels and the famed "Jerrycan" are stowed on the vehicles fenders and hull deck respectively. Special note should be made of the second man from the right. His weapon is not German but rather a captured Soviet PPSh M1941 submachine gun with 25 round box magazine.

The MG 34 and its replacement, the MG 42, were designed to be utilized in the light MG role with a bipod and in the heavy MG role using a tripod. Both weapons could be fired while "on the run" to keep the enemy's head down but to hand hold the 26 1/2 pound MG 34 or the 25 pound MG 42 and expect accurate fire was out of the question. Here one member of this SS MG 42 team provides a stable firing platform while the gunner concentrates on accurate fire.



Soviet artillery fire brought to bear on advancing Panzer elements.

Generally, the collar of the tunic was worn on the outside of the camouflaged pull-over jacket (smock) and exposed the insignia of rank. In this photo we can easily see the single "stern" (star) collar tab denoting the rank of SS Scharführer on the man in the center. From the mid-war years on, a system of bars and oak leaves were applied to the camouflage uniform to indicate the wearer's rank. A self-propelled gun, "Wespe," passes in the background.

7.5cm Pak 40. Shortly after the beginning of the Russian Campaign, it had become apparent that the 3.7cm and 5cm anti-tank guns would not be up to the job expected of them in effectively dealing with Soviet armor. Two 7.5cm anti-tank weapons had been under development in Germany since 1939, one by Krupp and one by Rheinmetall Borsig. Adopted as the standard anti-tank gun, the Rheinmetall Borsig model finally entered service in 1941, but not in adequate enough numbers until Fall of 1942.

(Above left) New Soviet tactics began to evolve during the Summer of 1942, an elastic defense. Any and all means were employed to hold up the advance of the German columns. When the situation appeared to be lost the Russian forces would withdraw as rapidly as possible and not allow themselves to be caught in a trap. The vastness of the Soviet countryside was an important element in allowing space to be traded for time, time to prepare not just another rear guard action but a major counteroffensive. This T-34 burns fiercely after set ablaze by a magnetic mine by the trooper to the left, now running for shelter.

A wire laying party from the Nachrichten Abteilung (Signals Battalion) pass through a recent battlefield. A fallen comrade has just been buried by the two SS men, his grave is fenced by Russian 7.62cm armor shells from the T-34 in back.

Frontal armor of the T-34/76 ranged from 45 to 60mm's and was well sloped, as is evident here. Armor protection on the KV series ranged from 75 to 110mm's, with generally flat surfaces and square angles. Both vehicles could be effectively combated by the 7.5cm Pak 40 at a range up to 1500 meters.

Pz IV G's withdraw after a local action during the Russian winter offensive, January 1943. In the foreground are the remains of a leichte Schützenpanzerwagen, Sd. Kf. 250/1, light armored half-track.

Early Tiger I Ausf E, Russia, Fall of 1942. Both the Tiger and Panther had resulted from the need of the Germans to regain technical supremacy in the tank field, lost when the Soviets introduced their T-34 during the first weeks of the campaign.

Production of the Tiger I lasted two years, August 1942 to August 1944, 1350 units being completed during this period. Panther series production commenced at about this same time, the first vehicles entering combat in mid-1943. A complete changeover in production for the Tiger and Panther from the existing standard tank, the Pz IV, could not be accomplished for this would have totally deprived the Army of any tanks to meet its ever increasing needs. Tank production on the Pz III chassis had been phased out, future construction being devoted to Sturmgeschütz.

The initial brunt of the Soviet offensive launched in January 1943 fell on the 2nd Hungarian Army, south of Voronezh. In rapid order a 175 mile gap had been cut in the German front lines. Overall Russian casualties were light in the beginning.

(Above left) Motorized 5cm anti-tank gun unit during the winter, 1942/43. Tow vehicles are the ammunition carrier (for light infantry guns), Sd. Kfz. 251/4, version of the standard "251" half-track. Other versions of this vehicle also viewed in photo are: on the left, the combat engineer equipment carrier, Sd. Kfz. 251/7, and on the right, the self-propelled 7.5cm L/24, Sd. Kfz. 251/9. All versions are the Ausf C model.

A varied selection of armored vehicles of "Leibstandarte" and their crews prepare to move to the Eastern Front, February 1943. On the left, Sd. Kfz. 251/3 radio vehicle, center, Panzerjäger 38(t) - Marder III Ausf H, right, StuG III F.

SS Oberscharführer of "Totenkopf" division and commander of this Pz IV G wears the all black uniform of the tanker. His awards include the Iron Cross 1st Class, Verwundeten-Abzeichen (Wounded Badge) and Infanterie-Sturmabzeichen (Infantry Assault Badge).

"LSSAH" returns to the Eastern Front, February 1943. "LSSAH," "Reich" and "Totenkopf" had returned to Europe in the summer of 1942 for reorganization. Combined together they formed the II. SS Panzer Korps, activated in July. II. Korps departed their French training areas to help stem the Soviet offensive then underway.

Marder III Ausf M of SS Panzer-Jäger Abteilung "LSSAH" 1. As evidenced by the ten victory rings on the gun's barrel, this crew is highly experienced in the business of tank hunting. Note the army eagle on the issued winter caps worn by the troops.

The Marder III Ausf H, self-propelled anti-tank gun, incorporated the chassis of the Czech 38(t) chassis and the 7.5cm Pak 40/3. With the rear mounted engine, the weapon was sited well forward; Ausf M models reversed this positioning. Crewman wears the one piece reversible camouflage overall suit, white side out.

Careful planning by Field Marshal von Manstein allowed the Soviet forces to be drawn into a pocket upon which XXXXVIII Panzer Korps struck from the right, "LSSAH" and "Reich" of II. SS Panzer Korps along with the Army's 6th, 11th and 17th Panzer divisions moving from the left. Leading the advance, the SS Panzer Korps entered Kharkov on March 15.

City street fighting could be an extremely dangerous situation for tanks unaided by infantry. SS man in the immediate foreground carries a hollow-charge "sticky" anti-tank grenade which would be attached to the side of the target and detonated like a normal hand grenade.

Success of the German advance during the Spring of 1943 lead Hitler to attempt to capitalize on this victory by launching his own Summer offensive near Kursk and Orel. II. SS Panzer Korps would again spearhead the operation in the southern sector. Information regarding Russian positions in the area is gathered from two prisoners by a SS Untersturmführer of "Totenkopf" and a SS Obersturmführer of "LSSAH".

(Below left) All available German armor would be combined into two pincers for **Operation Citadel,** code name for what became the greatest tank battle in history.

In an effort to confuse Soviet intelligence, the normal divisional insignia of the Waffen-SS divisions was changed prior to the opening of Citadel. The "new" insignia for "Reich" is seen on the right hand glacis plate of this early Tiger I.

German flags draped over the rear of the Tiger's turret is used for recognition by friendly aircraft. The Battle of Kursk was the first time aircraft had been employed in mass against armor. The results of this held great promise. Hans Rudel, famed Stuka pilot, used his cannon equipped Ju-87 to destroy twelve Russian tanks on the first day.

(Above left) Operation Citadel, the Battle of Kursk, opened at 1500 hours on the 4th of July, 1943. The overall terrain in the area was not considered "tank country." Tiger I of "Reich's" heavy tank company advanced during the first hours of the battle.

(Left) Some idea of the size of the Tiger I, weighing almost 56 tons, may be made by comparing it to the panzergrenadiers walking alongside.

Tiger scores a direct hit. "S11" identification on the rear of the turret seems to indicate this vehicle belongs to the heavy tank company, "S" for schwere (heavy), 1st platoon, 1st tank. "Reich's" insignia can be viewed under the left rear air cleaner.

Panzerbefehlswagen III K of SS Division "Reich" passes the burning hulks of U.S. made Lee tanks, July 1943. Large quantities of American and British war material were supplied to Stalin using the famed Murmansk Run.

StuG III Ausf G of SS Sturmgeschütz Abteilung 3, SS division "Totenkopf," during Operation Citadel. Comparison of the division insignia, located on the left front of the vehicle, should be made with that of "Reich" for this same period.

The long hard fight at Kursk brought victory close within German grasp but while T-34's flamed on the battlefield, other battlefields and situations drew attention from Kursk. American and British forces landed on Sicily, and Italy tottered on the edge of surrender. These events seemed to throw Hitler into a panic. He felt he needed to send forces to Italy to bolster the situation and he chose II. SS Panzer Korps, then heavily engaged between Orel and Belgorod. Citadel would be called off.

Pz V "Panther" Ausf A armed with the 7.5cm KwK 42 L/70. The Panther has been called the best "medium" tank of the Second World War.

(Top Right)As Citadel wound down, Soviet pressure built up, creating difficulties. Renewed attacks by the Russians only allowed II. SS Panzer Korps HQ and "LSSAH" to be transfered to Italy, the other two divisions of the corps remained behind to assist in stabilizing the front. The assault guns of the armored divisions played an important role in combating the growing numbers of Soviet tanks.

Assault gun detachment attacks during the Battle of Kursk, July 1943. Apart from the StuG's which were an organic part of armor divisions, at least ten independent detachments were found in the German table of organization for Citadel.

Sturm III Ausf G, late production version, featured the cast mantlet and a partially cast superstructure. By the end of 1944 Sturmgeschutzs, as a whole, had accounted for almost 20,000 destroyed enemy armored vehicles.

Panzer IV H's during the Ardennes offensive, December 1944. "LSSAH," "DAS REICH," 9. SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen," and "HJ" divisions were involved in Hitler's last great gamble, the Battle of the Bulge.

Army Panzergrenadiers, winter 1943/44. Army and SS Panzergrenadiers functioned in the same role. SS formations were more lavishly equipped. Winter uniforms, as viewed, range from the greatcoat through the two piece snow suit. Two men are wearing army camouflage pattern trousers in combination with the white jacket.

Citadel ended on July 13. Soviet losses had been heavier than those incurred by the Germans, some 85,000 men alone lost on the southern front of Kursk. Removal of the SS Panzer Corps precluded Manstein holding what had already been gained and by July 23 his forces were back to their starting lines of July 4. The German armored forces had been bled white.

(Left) SS armored infantryman outside his battalion headquarters, note battalion HQ pennant. Spigot type grenade launcher is attached to the barrel of his rifle, the rifle grenades themselves are carried in the canvas bag slung over his right shoulder. The entrenching tool and rifle ammo pouches are standard Army issue as are the goggles. Belt buckle is that for both the Waffen-SS and Allgemeine SS.

"Leibstandarte" upon its transfer to Italy left all equipment behind including its Pz IV's, Tigers and Sturmgeschütz. The vehicles and other items were divided amongst the depleted divisions remaining behind.

XVI SS Pz Gren Division
'Reichsführer SS'

XVII SS Pz Gren Division
'Gotz von Berlichingen'

XVIII SS Vol Pz Gren Division
'Horst Wessel'

(Below right) During the forming period of "HJ" division, equipment had been in short supply, typical of the period. While undergoing training near Reims, France, the armor regiment at one time, only possessed four each of the Panthers (illustrated) and Pz IV's with which it was to have been equipped. The division was brought up to full strength by the end of 1943.

"LSSAH" completely reequiped during its stay in Italy. Its armored battalions received the latest model of the Pz IV, the Ausf H, additional Tiger I's and the newest tank in the German inventory the Panther.

(Above) During the remainder of 1943, Russian forces maintained steady pressure on the combat front, pushing attacks forward and the Germans back. Kharkov had been retaken in late August, by the end of September the Donetz line had been broken. The continually shifting battle lines emphasized the importance of the Panzer divisions and motorized infantry units such as these SS Panzergrenadiers and their supporting assault guns.

"Hitlerjugend" division had been formed in Belgium during the summer of 1943 and remained there until April 1944 when it transfered to France. Stationed in the Normandie beachhead area, "HJ" division would be the first Waffen-SS unit to engage the Allies.

Generalfeldmarschall von Rundstedt, Commander in Chief West, SS Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich and "Panzer" Meyer, inspect the 12. SS Panzer Division "Hitlerjugend."

SS Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS Felix Steiner commanded "Wiking" division from December 1940 through May 1943. Use of the SS runes insignia on the steel helmet was discontinued in November 1943.

Half-track, Sd. Kfz. 251/4 Ausf D of "Wiking" division towing 7.5cm Pak.

(Below left) Panzer IV Ausf G armed with 7.5cm KwK L/48, in the foreground, is preceeded by Panzer III Ausf M armed with 5cm KwK L/60.

XXIII SS Vol Pz Gren Division 'Nederland'

A kill! SS Panzerjägers, wearing fur lined anoraks, score a direct hit on a Russian tank using their 5cm Pak.

02

635

XXXIV SS Gren Division
'Landstorm Nederland'

XXXV SS Pol Gren Division
'Polizei Division II'

XXXVI SS Waffen Gren Division
'Dirlewanger'

XIX SS Waffen Gren Division
'Latvian No II'

XX SS Waffen Gren Division
'Estonian No I'

XXI Waffen Geb Div der SS
'Skanderbeg'

XXII SS Frw Kav Division
'Maria Theresa'

XXIII SS Vol Pz Gren Division
'Nederland'

XXIV SS Waffen Mountain Div
'Karstjäger'

XXV SS Waffen Gren Division
'Hungarian No II'

XXVI SS Waffen Gren Division
'Hungarian No III'

XXXVII SS Vol Cavalry Division
'Lützow'

XXVII SS Vol Gren Division
'Flemish No I'

XXVIII SS Vol Pz Gren Division
'Wallonie'

XXIX SS Waffen Gren Division
'Italian No I'

XXX SS Waffen Gren Division
'Russian No II'

XXXI SS Frw Gren Division

SS Frw Gren Division
'Böhmen-Mähren'

XXXII SS Vol Gren Division
'January 30'

XXXIII SS Waffen Gren Division
'Charlemagne'

XXXVIII SS Pz Gren Division
'Nibelungen'

1944-1945

Grenadier, 12. SS Panzerdivision
"Hitlerjugend" - Normandy,
June 6, 1944.

Standartenführer Kurt "Panzer" Meyer
with Max Wünsche at the Ardenne Abby,
Normandy June 7, 1944

Oberscharführer. SS Panzerdivision
"Hohenstaufen", Hungary, 1945

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